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**Francesco De Angelis, Jens-Arne Dickmann, Felix Pirson, Ralf von den Hoff (ed.), *Kunst von unten? Stil und Gesellschaft in der antiken Welt von der "arte plebea" bis heute. Beiträge zu einem Kolloquium anlässlich des 70. Geburtstags von Paul Zanker, Rom, Villa Massimo, 8. bis 9. Juni 2007. Palilia vol. 27. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2012. Pp. 184. ISBN 9783895009150. €29.90 (pb).***

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The main objective of this round table was a reassessment of an old scholarly interpretation model of a phenomenon of Roman art and its relationship with Greek artistic expressions and styles: the distinction between “plebeian” and “popular” art as proposed by Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli (1900-1975) in the 1960s.<sup>1</sup> Paul Zanker, the dedicatee of the book, was influenced by this model, yet he did not copy it but tried to find explanations of his own. The editors wanted to explore the validity of this old concept, adapt it, if possible, to expressions of Greek art, or to deconstruct it, if necessary. In this book, artistic objects are studied as expressions of their historical and social contexts.

Ida Baldassarre discusses the topic of “arte plebea” by means of an example. In the “Tomb of the Harvest” in Ostia dated to the middle of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD, the eponymous images (six out of originally seven mosaic panels) show meticulously rendered stages of the production of grain next to a canonical Hercules and Alcestis, an appropriate funerary motif. Both are eloquent motifs and can be interpreted as linguistic expressions, like Bianchi Bandinelli’s model of a figural “language”. Baldassarre argues that the harvesting scenes rhetorically enhance the profession of the entombed person or persons and form a unique example of “comunicazione propagandistica” (p. 25), a conclusion with which I happily agree. One might ask, however, who commissioned the tomb, a multiple complex with sarcophagi and urns, and whether the complex was made for a *collegium* or the commissioner’s family.

Tonio Hölscher’s paper is the longest, but also most fundamental text of this volume, since he analyses the parameters of “arte plebea” and their validity. Many characteristics seen as typical for plebeian art do also occur in representational and imperial artistic forms (the latter are called “aulic”), so that these features do not define the supposed popular expressions. Hölscher tries to make clear that sets of forms, stylistic means and contents together determine whether art is “presentational” or “representational”, the former being more or less what Bianchi Bandinelli saw as “arte plebea”. The reader cannot but appreciate the fine analysis of juxtaposed monuments of the “grand” (imperial) arts and that of the more common Roman citizens and freedmen: the stylistic differences, mostly seen as the result of talented versus modest artists and craftsmen, are discussed in combination with iconography, and composition.

Three contributions focus on Pompeii. Mario Torelli analyses representations of situations like fulling<sup>2</sup> and the *largitio* of bread from Pompeian houses as Bianchi Bandinelli would have done. They are splendid examples of “arte plebea” and testify to the pride of the

freedmen and free men who practiced the tasks represented. In the latter respect one might associate them with expressions of “arte aulica”. He compares the phenomenon with Trimalchio’s display of professional pride in Petronius’ *Satyricon*. A flaw in Torelli’s sound and thorough paper is that we have no data about these people at all, that is, no names or indications of their professions.

The former superintendent of Pompeii, Pier Giovanni Guzzo, who with the legal historian Vincenzo Scarano Ussani has worked extensively on erotic paintings and the status of the women actively involved in those images as slave-prostitutes, sees this genre as expressions of “plebeian art”, but distinguishes two levels, a coarse one adorning bordello rooms and more ‘polite’ ones from private houses. The images apparently were adapted to the wishes of the Pompeian commissioners of the first century AD. Guzzo suggests the use of pattern books for the rather stereotypical images and recognises a specialized workshop for the coarse images.

Richard Neudecker makes good observations on the rendering of simple figural scenes from *cauponae* in Pompeii, among which are a couple of erotic scenes. He stresses the importance of these modest images as commodities of an image-poor lower class, which render visible the daily use of the bars and restaurants, some of them even accommodating sexual meetings of clients and bar personnel.

Alan Shapiro has good arguments for reinterpretation of a small set of late fifth-century BC Greek marble reliefs as the depiction of a hero taking leave from a lady rather than Aphrodite and Ares as lovers, which is the usual interpretation of these reliefs. The latter proposal can indeed easily be discarded, but the former is not so sure, even when Shapiro has good arguments to see here the Athenian heros Kodros and his wife Basile. While most of the reliefs he discusses are votive offerings, with the presence of the usual smaller figures as family members, one of them, the Leiden relief, is an exception. F.L. Bastet has described the slab, which contains no extra diminutive figures, as a funerary relief, a suggestion I cannot entirely dismiss.<sup>3</sup>

Filippo Coarelli discusses the paintings of two mid-republican tombs in the cemetery outside the Porta Esquilina near the Piazza Vittorio Emanuele in Rome. He advances specific proposals for the people buried in those graves, but interprets the differences in style as expressions of two realms. The fine decorations from the Tomb of Quintus Fabius Maximus Rullianus ( according to Coarelli) adorned the interior, while the crude scenes of the Tomb of Quintus Valerius Falto would have adorned the exterior. This would be a matter of visibility, of display of decorative programs, but in that case I wonder why the cruder ones were on view.<sup>4</sup>

Not at all “plebeian” are the expressions of Augustan art discussed by Adolf Borbein, who starts his fine essay with Paul Zanker’s concept of the hellenisation of Italy. Augustus and people around him combined Greek and Italic elements from which a new artistic and literary language emerged. Among his examples are the portraits of the first *princeps* which show him youthful rather than old and wrinkled as many of his predecessors and contemporaries. Traits from Alexander’s iconography as well as “quotations” from Italic terracotta male votive heads make him a new Romulus, which results in “einer einheimischen Bildnistradition” (p. 147). There is no break between local and international traditions but a gradual flow transmuting of iconic features from various existing traditions into a new artistic realm.

Henner von Hesberg does not believe in Bianchi Bandinelli's model of "arte plebea" and rather calls for sets of artistic means to create a "virtuelles Kommunikationssystem" (p. 164) that displays the messages the commissioner wants to communicate. He bases his conclusions on a brief but dense analysis of a number of funerary reliefs which show elements alien to the find spots and original environment and apparently convey the identity of a foreigner (at least as inferred from the burial place) to the inhabitants of the area. Like Borbein, he works with Hölscher's notion of the "Bildsprache als semantisches System."

R.R.R. Smith makes a sensitive comparison between imperial Roman reliefs from Rome and Aphrodisias that represent the (new?) status of "new citizens" — the term he uses for those usually called freedmen. Most of these works belong to the genre of funerary art— in Rome as reliefs adorning tomb building, in Aphrodisias sarcophagi. Smith has an interesting suggestion regarding the numerous unfinished portraits on the sarcophagi: they might reflect the modesty and piety of the deceased, who had ordered the large caskets while alive with heads left unworked. After their death, carvers would not have finished the reliefs. The large amount of sarcophagi in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century might be the consequence of Caracalla's 212 expansion of civil rights. People who now gained the status of Roman citizens wanted to show their new identity. In contrast, the old citizens retired from the public funerary space and constructed their tombs on private properties.

In sum, this is a rich and thought-provoking book. Hölscher's essay is, as already mentioned, the most important contribution. Therefore, it is regrettable that the other contributors did not take into account his thoughts about the "arte plebea" and its (im)possibilities. In general, there are no cross references within the book, although various monuments are discussed in more than one essay. Likewise, there is some duplication of identical images from the same monument ( the construction of a funerary monument from the Tomb of the Haterii in the Vatican Museums).

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## Notes:

1. First in an article in *Dialoghi di Archeologia* 1, 1967, 7-19, later in various other articles and books. The terminology of the counterpart to "arte plebea" or "arte popolare" is rather confusing, at least, in the introduction (pp. 7-13), where we find both "arte ufficiale" and "arte aulica"

2. On the scenes from fullery VI 8, 20, see now M. Flohr, *The World of the Fullo. Work, Economy, and Society in Roman Italy*, Oxford 2013, esp. 114-118, 144-146 (cf. index, p. 399).

3. F.L. Bastet and H. Brunsting, *Corpus signorum classicorum Musei antiquarii Lugduno-Batavi*, Zutphen 1982, 61 cat. 124.

4. Coarelli did not see my brief notes on these scenes: E.M. Moormann, "Scene storiche come decorazioni di tombe romane," in A. Barbet (ed.), *La peinture funéraire antique IV<sup>e</sup> siècle av. J.-C. – IV<sup>e</sup> siècle ap. J.-C. Actes du VII<sup>e</sup> colloque de l'Association Internationale pour la Peinture Murale Antique (AIPMA. 6-10 Octobre 1998, Saint-Romain-En-Gal – Vienne)*, Paris 2001, 99-107.